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Mr. President,

On behalf of all workers affiliated to the African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa), I want to protest vigorously against the way your government is dealing with the current strike of teachers in your country. The information we receive shows that, currently, the order of the day is the radiation of strikers, the stifling of freedom of expression, and arrests of trade unionists.

On Tuesday 20 March, Mr. **Ganiou YESSOUFOU** and his wife, who are professors at the Collège d'enseignement Général of the Akpakpa district of Cotonou, were arrested for violating the ban on meetings at the workplace. After pressure from the workers, they were released at 23 pm the same day. On Wednesday 21 March, 14 teachers of the Collège d'enseignement général "L'entente" of Cotonou were, on orders of the Director, beaten and detained for observing the sit-in strike. They were released three hours later, after strong protests from students and unions.

That same Wednesday, two union officials were arrested in the city of Abomey for having had exchanges on following up to the ongoing strike with their colleagues. Their names are **Jules AMOUSSOUGA** and **Cécil AYADOKOUN**.

All these events occurred against the background of the intransigent attitude of the Beninese authorities vis-à-vis the teachers' strike. While these public sector workers did nothing but defend their legitimate rights, your government responded with rarely seen repression, regardless of the fact that in the process, many fundamental rights are violated.

At a special meeting on Wednesday 14 March, the Council of Ministers, under your Presidency, decided among other things:

- The systematic removal from the Beninese public sector of all teachers who "continue the walkouts".
- The suspension from their functions, followed by the systematic removal of all officials in positions of authority, who would thus be "guilty of gross negligence by going on strike".

- The removal of teachers who “think up or are guilty of abandonment of service.”
- The opening of registration centers in all the garrison houses for registration of candidates for the teaching profession, where you expect, among others, "conscripts to military service [...] with a teacher’s profile" (sic).

Furthermore, the Council of Ministers banned all demonstrations and strike actions, mainly on the grounds of a decision of the Constitutional Court, ie that it would constitute discrimination and would therefore be illegal.

Mr. President, the situation described above is completely unacceptable to the light of fundamental rights of workers in Benin and worldwide. Expulsion as public sector workers on strike, their replacement by other workers (in this case, even military conscripts) or the prohibition of a strike are grave breaches C87 (on Liberty Association) and C98 (on the bargaining) and the Benin Constitution which recognizes and guarantees the right to strike. The right to strike is also guaranteed and protected by the jurisprudence of ILO supervisory bodies such as the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR), the Committee on Freedom of Association (CFA) and the Committee on the Application of Standards (CAS). In addition, as a member of the ILO and a signatory to the abovementioned Conventions, Benin has an obligation to preserve and promote the rights and principles enshrined therein.

We urge you to immediately stop the harassment, intimidation and arrests of strikers and trade unionists, and to ensure that the teachers’ strike can take place under normal circumstances and that workers who participate in it are not fired and replaced anymore. It is essential to the social peace in Benin that its workers can safely exercise their legitimate trade union rights, free from fear of persecution or reprisal. The current situation is not worthy of a country like Benin and we will not hesitate to expose it more on the international scene if the fundamental rights of its workers are not respected.



Kwasi Adu-Amankwah
General Secretary